

A BRIEF HISTORY OF TRANSLATION IN THE WESTERN WORLD

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ABSTRACT

The translation activity has been very old. One may say that its history traces back to the invention of human language. The earliest reference of translation activities was found in the third millennium BC. Though translation activity has been present throughout the existence of human civilization, till 20th-century translation was not given its due importance. During the 20th and 21st centuries, translation progressed a lot, established itself as a separate discipline as well and was given its due credit by Scholars all over the world. This present research paper looks at the history of translation in the west. It also aims at giving a brief outline to the researchers in the field of translation study. Different reference books have been used to collect the translated works and to decide the historical periods. Though this research scholar does not claim that this list is enervating but is still useful to the researchers.

KEYWORDS: *Translation Theory, Literary Translation & The Historiography of Translation*

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INTRODUCTION

Translation activity is as old as human civilization. The earliest reference to translation activity in waste is found in the 3rd Millennium BC. The Translation has been known as or given various adjectives like a traitor, Predator, cannibal, transformer, Bridge or sometimes deliverer.

Translation has been given its due importance in the last decade of the 20th century and continued to the path of success in the 21st century. Nowadays translation studies have been a favourite area of research scholars. "Books, journals and doctoral dissertations appear faster than one can read them all, and at the heart of most of the exciting new research are broad questions about ideology, ethics, and culture." (Kuhiwczak and Littau 14) This research paper aims at giving a brief outline of the history of translation in the west. It looks at the history of translation periodically for the sake of convenience.

The Roman Translations

The Romans have been considered as the earliest practitioners of translation activity. All the Greek works of religion, science, history, politics, medicine, had been translated into the Roman language. They have also attempted Bible translations. The earliest translators or theorists were Cicero and Horace. It was Cicero who opened the debate about 'word for word' and 'sense for sense' translation. Cicero discussed about the systematic translation process which was followed by the west. He was of the opinion to balance between, 'original source' and 'target text'. He did know about the translator's struggle and so he asked them to avoid being a Slave to the original text and he also advised the use of the new expressions. Romans seemed ready for 'word for word' or 'expression for expression' translation from Greek. They became successful in doing so.

Bible Translations

The Bible played very significant role in the history of translation. The Bible gave birth to Vernacular writing. This helped in the development of many European languages. Translations were used as defence weapon against the dogmatic beliefs of the church during that era. These various translations of the scriptures in the Vernacular made the corruption of clergy impossible. John Wycliffe, was the one who first attempted the Bible translation. He stressed the grammatical structure and complex meaning of the words. He advocated the comparison between target and source text structures. This became a necessary step for translating any text in other languages as well.

Renaissance Translations

During this period, especially in Europe, culture, religion and God became the centre. Thus, the renaissance gave birth to a new kind of Humanism. This influenced the translation style as well. Some creative liberties were taken by translators. Instead of source text and source readers, the target readers and target text were given more importance. The translations of the Petrarch's sonnets by Earl of Surrey, Shows creative appropriation. He did not follow 'word for word' translation process. He increased the use of 'I' to have an immediate impact on his readers. In the renaissance period, the reader-oriented translation process was popular.

Translations in Seventeenth Century

Till the mid-17th century, renaissance spirit was prevalent. Rationalism and reasoning, dominated English literature and literary criticism from the mid-17th century onwards. They started following Roman- Greek classical text as model for formulating rules of literature. There was an underlying notion of imitation. The process of translation was Systematic. John Dryden translated many classical texts like *Epistles of Ovid*. In his *Preface to Epistles* (1680) Dryden discussed his theory of translation. He has given three types of translations: (1) Metaphrase (2) Imitation (3) Paraphrase. For him 'paraphrase' is the best approach to translation. According to him 'metaphrase' refers to 'word for word' translation and 'imitation' refers to free translation. Dryden criticized Ben Johnson's translation of *Art of poetry* of being literal and so he accused it of using 'metaphrase'. He Considered Cowley's Translation of *Pindar* (1656) as 'imitation'. According to Dryden, 'paraphrase' leads to the 'sense for sense' translation. Alexander Pope was influenced by Dryden's views on translation. He also believed that the spirit of the original text should be captured in the translated text.

Translation in the 18th Century

The seventeenth-century method of translation was accepted and followed by 18th century translators as well. Dr Johnson justified Alexander pope's translations. he also asked three questions to the translators to consider, 1. What to translate? 2. Why to translate? 3. For whom to translate? Another trend popular during this time was the Retranslations of already translated works. One of the reason for these retranslations was to make them appropriate for contemporary readers. Eighteenth-century translation approach was target readership oriented. They used the language appropriate to the taste of the time. Alexander Fraser Tyler published, *The Principles of Translation* (1791). This was the first of its kind as far as the history of translation is considered. He mentioned three basic principles of translation:

- The translation must retain the complete idea of the original work,
- The style and manner of writing should be of the same type as the original and
- The translation should have the ease of the source language text.

For Tyler, even Dryden's process of 'paraphrase' led to loose translations. He recommended 'omission' and 'additions' to remove the ambiguities.

Translations in Romantic Age

Translation of these age gives new identity to the art of translation. They rejected the nationalism of the previous age and stressed on the importance of imagination. The translation process was also looked at from this perspective. Translation activity was considered as a higher creative activity. Shelley declares in *The Defence of Poetry*,

"It was as wise to cast a violet into a crucible that you might discover the formal principle of its colour and odour, as to seek to transfuse from one language into another creation of poet. The plant must spring again from its seed, or it will bear no flowerer and this is the burthen of the cure of Babel." (Shelly, 33)

The Victorian Translations

The Victorian translators added archaism to the art of translation. This provided a sense of obscurity to the literary translations. Matthew Arnold's lecture series, *On Translating Homer*, is very significant. He Considered Scholars as the true judge of translated texts. Only they can decide the effect of translated text as compared to the original text. His advice to the critics of translation was this: "Let him ask how his work affects those who both know Greek (the language of the original text) and can appreciate poetry." (Arnold, 99). According to Matthew Arnold, the translator first must destroy or dissolve the original text to bring the target text reader to the source language text through the transition.

Henry Wordsworth Longfellow, discussed the process of translation while discussing his own translation of Dante's *Divine Comedy*. Henry Wordsworth Longfellow Put stress on rhyme in poetry translation. For him, Stylistic features should be considered as they are different from the spirit of the work, especially in poetry translation.

On the contrary, Edward Fitzgerald was of the opinion that one can translate the spirit of the source text to the target language text. In his translated work, *Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam* (1858), Fitzgerald demonstrated that, it was possible to translate the spirit of source text into culture of the target text, as a living entity. At the end of the 19th century, translated texts were given an independent place in the literature.

Twentieth Century Translations

The twentieth century witnessed the development of various linguistic and literary theories. These linguistic and literary theories influenced the translations of this period as well. Theories of American structuralism and theories based on Noam Chomsky, had great influence on literary translations. During 1980s, few theorists tried to combine linguistic and literary theories of translation. During this time, language and literary text were seen to be rooted in the cultural matrices of a speech community. In the words of Larsen,

"Each society will interpret a message in terms of its own culture: The receptor audience will decode the translation in terms of its own culture and experience, not in terms of the author and audience of the original documents." (Larson, 436-37)

Translators preferred literal translations till the half of the 20th century. Liberal translations for considered as

‘free’ or ‘inferior’ translations. This shifted to consensus and common-sense approach during the second half of the twentieth century. This new approach avoided not only the form of the source text but also the sense.

CONCLUSIONS

The history of translation in the west is very extensive. It has been an act of making language and culture more reach. It has been the act of reaching to masses through translations of the Bible and other scriptures. It has been an act of refining the literary form and style, as in the restoration age. It has provided the material for comparative study of the best works of the world literature, in the 19th and 20th centuries. Thus, translation has been a significant part of Cultural study, literary study and language study throughout the world.

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